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Use of Nuclear Weapons Is An Invitation to Disaster

IF I WERE running for the Presidency, I would first learn one lesson from the primer. Use imperative, and sometimes declarative, but never conditional sentences!

A few weeks ago I reacted to the rumors that tactical nuclear weapons might be used at Khesanh. The White House has already heard so much about the hazards of nuclear escalation that it must be deaf to any further reference to this particular argument. What else remains to be said? I wrote on an obvious point but one which has not been mentioned enough, that an independent nuclear policy on this issue would complete the alienation of the U.S. from its alliances for collective defense. This political disruption would be immensely more costly than any possible stake in Southeast Asia.

TO MY astonishment, some of my friends and readers thought I must be condoning the use of tactical nuclear weapons. They may have reached this conclusion because I attempted to quote and discuss the arguments that might be used by the proponents of such a policy, to understand them before condemning them. Scientists by nature must make studied hypotheses however repugnant. No poli-

tician would ever make such a mistake!

It is widely asserted that a nuclear attack even at the lowest tactical level might inevitably escalate to nuclear annihilation. This belief may be useful as a deterrent to nuclear military experiments; but its utility turns into ashes if the deterrent should ever fail. Therefore I might like many other people to maintain such a belief, but shudder to have to believe it myself.

WHY THEN is a tactical nuclear bombing "lunacy," as Prime Minister Wilson calls it? If the Vietcong had nuclear weapons, their tactics would not be likely to depend on ours. Until they do, where would the escalation come from? The answer is unhappily only too obvious from the U.S. itself.

At the moment there is a real distinction between a kiloton of nuclear weaponry and 40 conventional B-52 bomb loads. The distinction is not in military efficacy or in human and physical destruction, but in the public perception of these events. However irrational, the distinction is real if it inhibits starting on the path of nuclear deployment, a path which has no currently visible barricades before the end. If the first barrier is once broken by the United States, how will our own military planning hereafter resist the compulsion to save American lives in any

tight situation by repeating the exercise? And why not routinely use ten kilotons if it costs no more than one? In fact, it is more humane to be sure of reaching the military objectives at the first strike once there is any commitment to this kind of force. But it will then not be too long before the anxieties of other nuclear powers are stretched to the point of some defensive probing or retaliation to such an unrestrained escalation of our own use of force.

THE MAIN danger of even a minimal tactical deployment of nuclear weapons is that the door is opened to our own reliance on infinitely destructive technology.

If, then, the President were ever so foolish as to lead the United States into a situation (like a Dunkirk evacuation) where the overt threat or use of nuclear weaponry seemed the only way out, he must not stop with ordering the rescue. He must have a credible plan to assure that this is a unique event which dampens further reliance on such weapons.

That kind of assurance is so implausible that I do indeed condemn the folly in the first place.

Nuclear armaments are a necessary defense against nuclear blackmail. To rely upon them for any other purpose is an invitation to disaster. The U.S. already knows the taste of it if its confidence in its nuclear stockpile has impelled an unrealistic sense of one nation's power to pacify the world by the force of arms rather than ideas.